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December 27, 1963

By mg N443, Date 12-9-85

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT - December 19, 1963 - 10:55 A.M.

SUBJECT: Cuba

Others Present: Acting Secretary Ball; Ambassador Thompson; Deputy Under Secretary Johnson; Assistant Secretary Martin; John Crimmins; Acting Secretary Gilpatrick; Secretary Vance; General Wheeler; Secretary Dillon; Acting Director General Carter; Richard Helms; Deputy Director Wilson; McGeorge Bundy; William Moyers; George Reedy; Gordon Chase.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to brief the President in depth about some of the basic Cuban issues. Essentially, the discussion described where we have been since January, 1963, where we are now, and where we can go. (An outline which was prepared for the discussion is attached.)



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

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The group agreed that this is not an easy problem. Mr. Ball said that our allies have always been reluctant to interfere with private traders and have always had a different view of Free World Bloc trade than we have had. Nevertheless, it was also agreed that we should intensify our efforts and that there are still things we can do. First, Mr. Grimmings noted that we could consider ways in which the new amendment to the Foreign Assistance Authorization Act (prevents assistance to any country whose planes or ships carry commodities to Cuba) can be used to reinforce our economic denial program. Second, Mr. Ball said that the question of Canadian trade in sensitive items would be taken up with the Canadian Minister of Economics and Trade on December 20; later, Mr. Ball will talk to other appropriate Free World governments also. Third, the President directed that the agencies prepare a detailed memorandum (including the names of companies and commodities involved in Free World trade with Cuba) which, inter alia, will be useful for his forthcoming talks with Prime Ministers Home and Pearson.

(d) 

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 The President asked whether there is any significant insurgency within Cuba. 

 Mr. Bundy noted that the insurgents generally seem to suffer heavy losses at Castro's hands. 

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2. Mr. Bundy gave a very quick briefing on some other aspects of the current Cuban situation. (The group paused to read the attached CIA situation brief.)

(a) With respect to Soviet/Cuban military strength on the island, Mr. Bundy noted that one of our primary objectives is to ensure that there is no reintroduction of offensive missiles. The camera is our best inspector and, so far as we know, there are no offensive missiles now in Cuba. Mr. Bundy added that we are concerned about the transfer of SAM control to the Cubans in about mid-1964, and we will have to watch this development carefully. As for the Soviet troops, the general consensus of the group was that the big withdrawals are over and that, from here on, the withdrawals will proceed more slowly.

(b) Mr. Bundy noted, in passing, our anti-subversion efforts. The key to the problem is to build up the will and capabilities of the Latin American countries to counter the threat. Our efforts in the field of controlling travel between Latin America and Cuba are also important.

(c) Mr. Bundy described briefly the very tenuous, sensitive, and marginal contacts we have established with Castro himself. The initiative is on Castro's part and we are essentially faced with a decision as to whether or not we are prepared to listen to what Castro has to say. Mr. Ball noted that such U.S. / Cuban contacts could have an unsettling effect on Soviet/Cuban relations.

3. Mr. Bundy described several unilateral and bilateral courses of action we can take in the future to make life difficult for Castro.

(b) Mr. Bundy said that we can take further unilateral shipping measures -- e.g. close ports and deny U.S. -financed commodities to lines engaged in Free World shipping to Cuba. He noted, however, that we have found through past experience that bilateral measures are more effective in reducing Free World shipping to Cuba. At the same time, we should not deceive ourselves.

We should recognize that the Soviets are capable of handling all Cuba's shipping needs even if we are able to eliminate Free World shipping to Cuba.

(c) Mr. Bundy said that the President could make a public statement in the near future, taking a more vigorous line than we have in the past. He noted that in his November 18 speech, President Kennedy made two points about Cuba -- the first was designed to encourage anti-Castro elements within Cuba to revolt, and the second was to indicate that we would not permit another Cuba in the Hemisphere.

(d) Bilaterally there are possibilities of increasing our pressures against Free World trade to Cuba. Spain should be a high priority target.

NOTE: At this point the President left the room and there was a brief discussion about the exiles in Florida. Mr. Crimmins said that resettlement remains our basic policy. It is true that the exiles feel that the pressure for their resettlement is intense. In fact, it is no more intense now than it has been for some time.

5. On the President's return to the room, Mr. Bundy introduced the subject of the discovery in Venezuela of the Cuban arms cache.

(a) Mr. Helms gave a graphic presentation of the link between the arms cache and a plot to upset the elections in Caracas.

(b) Mr. Martin explained the status of the OAS investigation of the arms cache. The evidence is convincing in showing that the arms were from Cuba. The OAS investigating team is still working on its report. Hopefully, it will be able to tie the arms cache into a general plot to subvert Venezuela. The report should be ready by about January 10.

(c) Mr. Bundy described the types of action we can hope to get in the OAS as a result of the discovery of the arms cache. The most interesting is the surveillance action where we have essentially two basic choices -- we may want to push for a system which involves search and seizure of Cuban vessels on the high seas; this implies the possible use of force. Or we can push for a system involving the search and seizure of Cuban vessels in territorial waters; this evades the issue of force. Mr. Bundy added that it is still too early to know how far the Latin Americans will go in support of force against Castro. We have put out feelers.

6. Mr. Bundy brought up the problem of lifting travel restrictions on Americans who wish to go to Cuba. Mr. Ball noted that a great number of students want to

go down to Cuba during the Christmas holidays and that Justice Department recommends that we lift our travel restrictions. If we don't, we will probably be obliged to put many of the students in jail when they return; this will be embarrassing. Mr. Ball added that the State Department is tentatively opposed to lifting the travel restrictions because of the effect it will have on Latin American countries. We have been trying to get the Latin Americans to impose restrictions on travel to Cuba; if we lift our own restrictions, our position will be considerably weakened. Mr. Ball said that he would be meeting with the Attorney General later in the day to talk about the subject.

Tentatively, the President indicated that he favored maintaining the travel restrictions and a policy of selective prosecution.

Gordon Chase